DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 387 761 CG 026 569

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TITLE Demonstration of: "An Experiential Excercise in Cultural Diversity."
PUB DATE 95
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting and Exhibit of the American Educational Research Association (San Francisco, CA, April 18-22, 1995).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Consciousness Raising; Counseling; Counselors; *Counselor Training; Cultural Awareness; *Cultural Education; Cultural Pluralism; Ethnic Groups; Higher Education; Intercultural Communication; *Multicultural Education; *Perspective Taking; *Role Playing

ABSTRACT

Participation in "Culture Day" was a requirement for students taking the course, "Career and Personal Counseling in Diverse Cultural Settings." Scheduled during a regular class session, students took on the persona of an individual of another culture, gender or other group. Students were expected to remain "in character" throughout the class session while they acted as counselor, client, and observer. The 13 students were surveyed about their experience 3 times: 1 month prior to Culture Day, at the conclusion of the Culture Day class session, and 1 month later. Student answers were anonymous, using a coding system that allowed instructors to note changes over time. Half of the student's responses became more positive, five students felt more capable of understanding and valuing people from the culture they portrayed, five felt no more capable, and three felt less capable. Most students did not feel they had more understanding of people from different cultures, and seven students felt Culture Day had the potential to teach students more about themselves. Included are a description of the Culture Day assignment, some examples of student culture day questionnaires, a summary of questionnaire results, and Tips for Counselors induced from the Culture Day experience. (JBJ)

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ED 387 761

Demonstration of: "An Experiential Exercise in Cultural Diversity"

by Anna M. Ranieri, Stanford University

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Demonstration of: "An Experiential Exercise in Cultural Diversity"
1995 AERA Interactive Symposium: "Innovative Counselor Training: Multicultural and Multimedia"
Presenter: Anna M. Ranieri, Stanford University

Culture Day Course Component

Participation in Culture Day was a requirement for students taking the course: "Career and Personal Counseling in Diverse Cultural Settings". Culture Day was scheduled during a regular class session. It was an opportunity for each student to take on the persona of an individual of another culture, gender or other group. The student was expected to remain "in character" throughout the class session. During this time, the student acted as counselor, client and observer in three separate counseling sessions. A description of Culture Day is provided.

It is a difficult assignment, and there was much anxiety about the experience. Some students asked whether this material couldn't just as well be covered by bringing a panel of individuals from different cultures into the classroom for a discussion. The instructors felt strongly, however, that the visceral experience engendered by Culture Day would be important for the counseling students. A description of Culture Day is attached and was read to the audience.

Variety of Personas Chosen

Despite some apprehension, the students elected to take on some difficult roles in their choice of personas to portray on Culture Day. Examples of the roles chosen include (in the students' words):

1. Real identity: Caucasian female, age 40. Culture Day persona: Black male freshman at Stanford from a small town in Missouri, parents divorced. Was a superstar in high school, but haven't yet found my niche at Stanford. Worried about going home at Thanksgiving without having any major accomplishments.

2. Real identity: Vietnamese-American female, age 23. Culture Day Persona: I was Maria, a 15 year old Chicana gang member from East L.A. who's sick of all the killing and revenge and just wants to get out but doesn't know how.

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3. Real identity: Caucasian female, age 29. Culture Day Persona: I was a 53 year old Jewish lesbian, getting divorced from my second husband. I was very happy about finally coming into my own as a lesbian, yet I was worried about the impact that the divorce and my being gay would have on my fifteen year old daughter.

4. Real identity: Caucasian gay male, age 30. Culture Day Persona: I was Barbara, a 35 year old blind woman whose parents both died this past summer. I have only a high school diploma and have never worked. I need to find a job to support myself.

Research on the Culture Day Experience

The thirteen students in the course were surveyed about their experience three times: one month before Culture Day, again at the conclusion of the Culture Day class session, and approximately one month after Culture Day. They were asked the same four open-ended questions each time:

1. How are you feeling about the experience called "Culture Day"?

2. To what extent do you feel that you really understand and value people from the culture you have chosen to portray on Culture Day?

3. To what extent do you feel that you really understand and value people from cultures that differ from the cultures you identify with?

4. How do you feel about the potential in Culture Day for learning about yourself?

Examples of the answers to these questions are attached to this document and were read to the audience.

Results of the Research

Each student answered the questions anonymously, but using a coding system that allowed us to note changes in each person's answers over time. We compared their answers prior to Culture Day with their responses just after, and one month after Culture Day.

The results are attached to this paper, and were read to the audience. The following is a summary of the results. It must be borne in mind that our instrument was a self-report, and that we are attempting to assign answers in essay format to arbitrary categories ("increased" or "decreased" over time, or "no change").

About half the students' responses to Culture Day (question 1) became more positive over time. We attribute this partly to their relief at having successfully got through an experience that had caused some apprehension.

Five students felt more capable over time of understanding and valuing people from the culture they had portrayed (question 2), while five felt no more capable than at the start, and three actually felt less capable. These answers demonstrate the complexity of this experience, and its limitations.

Few students felt that they had more understanding over time of people from different cultures (question 3). Most were unchanged in this respect. One would not, of course, expect the isolated experience of Culture Day to create much headway in this area.

What was most interesting was the response to question four. Seven students felt more positive over time about the potential in Culture Day for learning about *themselves.* On this basis, we hope that Culture Day indeed contributed something to their training as counselors. While it certainly could not provide instant understanding of others, the experience was helpful for several students in learning about themselves as potential clients and counselors.

Learning from the Experience

At the conclusion of Culture Day, we solicited from the students a list of the things they had learned as counselors. That list ("Tips for Counselors") is attached to this document and was read to the audience. It summarizes some wise precepts about the counseling relationship in general and about sensitivity to clients' cultural and individual differences.

Culture Day

Purpose: An old Indian proverb states that you can never understand a man until you walk in his moccasins. (The proverb originated when generic pronouns were all masculine, so we need to understand it as applying equally to women also.) On Culture Day we will try to walk in someone else's moccasins. There are two primary purposes:

(1) Empathic Understanding: We will try to discover what it might feel like to be a person who comes from a different background than we ourselves came from. Your goal is to begin to experience some small part of the thinking, feeling and behavior that are associated with someone different from you.

(2) Helpful Counselor Behavior: We will be trying to induce from this experience some guidelines that counselors might follow to be particularly helpful with clients different from themselves.

Procedure: For two hours you are to be some person who represents a cultural group(s) different from your own. Ideally that person should be a living contemporary though you are free to choose to be whomever you wish. Try to pick someone from a group(s) that you have difficulty understanding but would like to understand. Do some studying of the history and difficulties of people who come from that background. You are to be just one person, however, not a group. Your person might not necessarily possess all the characteristics of the average person in the group(s) that you have chosen. No one is average in all respects. Be a unique individual, not a stereotype.

Task: During the two hours you will have the opportunity to perform three tasks--all the while remaining "in character" as the person you have chosen.

(1) Client: You should come to class prepared to present a problem or concern to a counselor who would like to help you. Identify some realistic concern that the person you have chosen to be has actually had or might reasonably be expected to have.

(2) Counselor: You will be asked by a "client" to help resolve some difficulty that the client will present to you. Try your best to be helpful. You may turn to your Consultant for ideas and suggestions for how to proceed.

(3) Consultant: You will be available to the Counselor to offer ideas and suggestions for how best to help the Client. After the counseling roleplay, you will also lead and take notes on the feedback session designed to identify the most helpful statements or actions performed by the Counselor.

Schedule: You will be assigned to three triads during the two hours. You will have a different set of partners in each of the three triads. In each triad you will perform a different task as described above. Follow this schedule in each triad:

(1) Introductions: Introduce yourself to your two colleagues (the name of your person along with pertinent cultural identification; name tags will be provided to aid the memory). [2 minutes total for the three of you]

(2) Counseling Roleplay: Conduct an abbreviated simulated counseling interview in which the client presents a concern while the counselor attempts to be as helpful as possible. [15 minutes]

(3) Feedback: Review the interview with the purpose of identifying the most helpful counselor actions. All three members of the triad should contribute their observations--each still remaining in character. [10 minutes]

Summary: After you have each completed the three roleplay and feedback experiences, we will pool our observations for the purpose of summarizing the most useful counselor practices in responding helpfully to culturally diverse clients.

Culture Day Questionnaire

1. How are you feeling about the experience called "Culture Day"?

excited, clueless about what to do.
would love to see what everyone else does.
great idea! will be fun.

2. To what extent do you feel that you really understand and value people from the culture you have chosen to portray on Culture Day?

...see above. I would try to pick one I value, but don't understand enough to be comfortable.

3. To what extent do you feel that you really understand and value people from cultures that differ from the cultures you identify with?

mixed — I think I understand many, but can't value many — i.e. those w/ different moral/ ideological opinions that I find repugnant, including (some) members of groups I identify with. Some maturation need.

4. How do you feel about the potential in Culture Day for learning about yourself?

...haven't thought about it that way — will much more interested in learning about others & the cultures they chose to represent. Perhaps I will learn something about myself that I'm not somewhat tired of myself — interested in others.

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Culture Day Questionnaire

1. How are you feeling about the experience called "Culture Day"?

Quite uncomfortable. It feels contrived & unnatural. With all the heavy workload I have, I would rather not have to think about this.

2. To what extent do you feel that you really understand and value people from the culture you have chosen to portray on Culture Day?

I can understand & appreciate my chosen population, especially since I took on my friend's situation.

3. To what extent do you feel that you really understand and value people from cultures that differ from the cultures you identify with?

I took a X-cultural counseling class last year which raised my awareness quite a bit on the issues involved.

4. How do you feel about the potential in Culture Day for learning about yourself?

I feel like it would be more of a burden than a learning experience. Of course, this would change if I felt more open to the idea.

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12/5

Culture Day Questionnaire

1. How are you feeling about the experience called "Culture Day"?

still enjoyed it & glad we did it & you should have it again.

2. To what extent do you feel that you really understand and value people from the culture you have chosen to portray on Culture Day?

better now than before — explaining my character helped me to verbalize what I've seen & experienced from members of that group.

3. To what extent do you feel that you really understand and value people from cultures that differ from the cultures you identify with?

a bit, since I hop in & out of different cultures w/in the same dividing characteristic (diff. religious groups, diff. ethnic groups, etc.) — & have generally not closed myself or hated the other groups.

4. How do you feel about the potential in Culture Day for learning about yourself?

good. I learned about my potential to be a different person, to see others & my reactions to them (or my character's presumed reaction to them)..

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Culture Day Questionnaire

1. How are you feeling about the experience called "Culture Day"?

Like I have way too much end-of-term "stuff" on my mind to think about answering this again (no hostility intended)

2. To what extent do you feel that you really understand and value people from the culture you have chosen to portray on Culture Day?

quite a bit (value)
not as much (understand) as I would like

3. To what extent do you feel that you really understand and value people from cultures that differ from the cultures you identify with?

depends on the culture

4. How do you feel about the potential in Culture Day for learning about yourself?

it definitely shows me my attitudes & resistances. good inner material to examine

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Culture Day Questionnaire Results

Question	Response change over time +	-	NC
1. How are you feeling about the experience called "Culture Day"?	6	0	7
2. To what extent do you feel that you really understand and value people from the culture you have chosen to portray on Culture Day?	5	3	5
3. To what extent do you feel that you really understand and value people from cultures that differ from the cultures you identify with?	3	1	9
4. How do you feel about the potential in Culture Day for learning about yourself?	7	3	3

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Tips for Counselors

Induced from our

Culture Day

Experience

November 14, 1994

- Listen to what the client is saying.
- Communicate your understanding of the client's concerns.
- Attend to the emotion behind the words and the meaning it has for the client.
- Clarify the nature of the client-counselor relationship.
- Acknowledge the importance of the client's concern.
- Be respectful and nonjudgmental of the client's situation.
- Introduce a discussion of the client's culture only if it is pertinent to the concern.
- Indicate your desire to learn more about the client's background.
- Help clients to articulate the values that they hold.
- Use knowledge of cultural differences to explain client's dilemma.
- Limit the number of suggestions given to the client at any one time.
- Make any suggestions specific and concrete.
- Be willing to refer the client to another counselor if a better match would result.